Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

24 July 2024

Report of the Chief Digital Officer

Wards Affected: All

Matter for Monitoring

Report Title:

1.   Neath Port Talbot Digital, Data and Technology Strategy review 2024.

Purpose of the Report:

2.   To provide Cabinet Members with the annual progress update on the Neath Port Talbot Council's Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy for 2023/24 and seeking their continued support for the Strategy in 2024/25.

Executive Summary:

3.   The Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council DDaT Strategy (*www.npt.gov.uk/ddat-strategy*) has been designed to support the transformation of our council services to residents, businesses, and visitors.

4.   Approved by Council in July 2023, the Strategy sets out our strategic vision, aims and delivery themes, demonstrating how we will embrace innovative approaches and emerging technologies to provide our users with the best value, user-centred products and services.

5. This report sets out the considerable progress that Digital Services has made in 2023/24, providing a robust and sustainable DDaT service and pipeline of digital delivery to underpin council service delivery. The achievements for 2023/24 have been set out by the four strategic delivery themes within the Strategy and include the categorisation and benefits that have been delivered (Appendix 1 & 2).

6. Given the current pressures the council is facing, the importance of digital services in service delivery, transformation and efficiency cannot be underestimated.

7. Through our DDaT strategy, we remain committed to continually investing in the council's DDaT capabilities to ensure we can successfully meet our current and future challenges.

Background:

8. Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) is fundamental to the successful delivery of council services.

9. Our Vision is clear – 'We wish to adopt the best Digital, Data and Technology to transform the services we deliver to residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitors'.

10. To ensure that we fully capitalise on the transformational benefits that DDaT offers, we are working with service areas across the council to ensure it becomes an embedded part of how we operate – across people, process, and technology.

11. The extreme pressures that public sector budgets are under is well documented, however we recognise the key opportunities that DDaT presents to support this organisational challenge. Through the effective use of DDaT, we will continue to drive value and service improvement across service areas, whilst

delivering efficiencies and savings. We will also ensure there is alignment with the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

12. The strategy continues to deliver and align to the four well-being objectives and nine transformation programmes in the Corporate Plan 2022-27, along with the wider feedback from our residents captured in the 'Let's Talk' campaign with continued feedback received through a range of channels.

13. Appendix 1 – Achievements Benefits Matrix clearly highlights how the delivery across 2023-24 has supported the organisations alignment to the five sustainable development principles.

14. Significant progress has been made in 2023/24, with the further embedding of the Target Operating Model, along with the alignment of service priorities to the overall DDaT Strategy.

15. Through the introduction of a service delivery pipeline and supporting Digital Transformation Board, we have worked with all Directorates to better prioritise activities, moving towards a more proactive approach for workload management.

16. Regular engagement with all directorates and service area senior management teams has ensured the priorities remain relevant and will continue to support the evolving landscape in our service delivery.

17. Although there is now process and structure around the prioritisation of planned work, the Digital Services team continues to deliver extensive reactive support across the council's service areas, which is linked to residual legacy platforms and technical debt that we have accumulated over many years.

18. Whilst we fully recognise that we are still transitioning from a traditional IT Division to a Digital Division, the achievements over the last year demonstrate how we are driving the evolution of the council from one which simply commissions and consumes a wide range of ICT solutions and services, to one which has embraced real user centred design, along with agile delivery ensuring the appropriate use of Digital, Data and Technology.

19. All staff across the Digital Services Division have been engaged in the development and ongoing evolution of the DDaT strategy through their 1:1 appraisal, team meetings and annual staff surveys. This is helping individuals understand how the roles they play are contributing to the wider divisional and corporate objectives.

20. During 2023/24 there has been several independent scrutiny exercises undertaken on the DDaT Strategy, including the Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review exercise undertaken between July and October 2023. The findings of this report were very positive, with only one recommendation identified which has since been addressed.

21. In addition, officers engaged with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to undertake their Digital Self-Assessment review in January 2024. Feedback on the council's position was extremely positive, scoring 65 out of 65 on the topics covered.

22. WLGA went on to comment 'The Council's strategic approach to digital is well aligned with its other key plans and strategies and those of its partners and it has strong arrangements to communicate its strategic digital approach'.

23. As a council, we remain fully committed to helping our digitally excluded people access the benefits of being online. We understand that there are a wide range of reasons why people

may find it hard or impossible to stay connected with family and friends (including skills, affordability, availability of broadband connectivity, personal choice etc.), recognising that this also prevents them from being able to benefit from accessing key services from government channels to online shopping.

24. To further support our digitally excluded residents, through well-being objective 2 in our Corporate Plan - 'All communities are thriving and sustainable, we have set out a clear aim to ensure 'People are connected within their community; communities are connected to each other and the wider world through good quality digital services and transport networks'.

25. The council has committed to the Digital Inclusion Charter, which aims to promote basic digital skills and helping people get online.

26. We have also recently ensured alignment to the recommendations set out in the Older People's Commissioner for Wales report 'Access Denied: Older people's experiences of digital exclusion in Wales', published in January 2024.

27. The service also continues to make inroads into providing better digital connectivity across the County Borough.

28. High-speed fixed broadband availability across the County Borough has increased dramatically since 2019 and is now higher than the Welsh average, with 99% of residents now able to access superfast speeds of 30Mb/s+, whilst 75% of residents can access ultrafast speeds of 300Mb/s+.

29. Commercial and Public sector broadband interventions, such as Swansea Bay City Deal Digital Infrastructure programme, UK Government's Project Gigabit and commercial broadband rollouts will further improve on these figures at pace.

30. Our website provides information on getting online, and social tariffs, landline switch-off plans - https://beta.npt.gov.uk/your-community/better-broadband/

31. The Digital Services Broadband Engagement officer also conducts in-person sessions with residents, explaining their options for getting online.

Digital Delivery Process Overview

32. To manage the incoming demand requests from service areas in a controlled and structured way, ensuring appropriate prioritisation and resource management, the Digital Delivery Board and associated process was introduced in July 2024.

33. The Digital Delivery Board plays a critical role in the delivery of the DDaT Strategy. They review problem statements from across the organisation (which any officer can submit), and either approve and schedule, or recommend an alternative approach.

34. In summary, the Board is responsible for ensuring the following outcomes are achieved:

- All digital transformation initiatives:
    - Are fully funded.
    - Meet Corporate and/or DDaT Strategy objectives.
    - Align to digital service standards.
    - Provide value on investment.
    - Have committed resources and clear timelines.

- Provide management control over Digital Services inflight and pipeline workloads acting as decision maker on project prioritisation; and

- Ensuring appropriate governance controls are in place.

35. To assist in the review of the requests submitted, officers use an eleven-step checklist to triage requests before they get to Board.

36. Digital Services Business Relationship Officers are on hand to support the service areas, acting as 'Intelligent Clients' to ensure all appropriate information is gathered and submitted.

37. Requests are fully investigated and researched, gathering evidence of compliance / support in the following areas:

   - Wellbeing objectives.
   - DDaT service standards.
   - NPT Corporate Plan and Strategic Themes.
   - Sustainable development principles.
   - NPT Technology Code of practice.
   - NPT Digital Service Standards.
   - Local Digital Declaration.
   - Biodiversity Plan.

38. The final elements that must be identified from the outset are the overall benefits of the request, including how they will be measured upon completion. These benefits are categorised and weighted dependant on their importance in the following areas:

   - **Financial** - Where there is a direct or indirect positive contribution to the council's budget (e.g. cashable savings, removal / reduction in software licences etc).
   - **Information** - Actions that result in the improvement in the collection, collation, classification and storage of the council's information / data (i.e. adding predefined drop-down selections for data entry, reducing keying errors).

- **Service** - Where there is a direct improvement in service to Residents, Businesses, Elected members, staff or visitors (i.e. the ability for residents to apply for or access a service online).

- **Reputational** - Actions that remove or reduce the threat to the good name or standing of the council either directly, as the result of the actions of the council, indirectly, due to the actions of staff, or third-party partners / suppliers (i.e. introducing cyber security measures to prevent the unauthorised access to information).

- **Resources** - Could resources be redeployed to other areas of the council (i.e. reallocation of staff, moving software licences from one service area to another).

- **Statutory** – Changes in statutory responsibilities which cannot be avoided.

39. The outputs from this process enable digital services to effectively plan the use of its resources to provide the maximum return for the council and aid in the delivery of its objectives.

40. As shown above careful consideration has been given to ensure the delivery objectives align to some or all the four well-being objectives / delivery programmes in the Corporate Plan and the requirements of our local communities captured through the 'Let's Talk' and 'let's keep talking' engagement campaigns.

41. With a continued commitment to engage with our communities, local businesses and partners through the Let's keep Talking campaign, officers have ensured the digital strategy will continue to meet our stakeholders' future needs.

42. The Digital Delivery Pipeline is reviewed at Directorate quarterly meetings, updates to Corporate Directors Group and reported to Cabinet as part of the DDaT Strategy annual report, but is also

maintained and visible to all staff via the council's intranet (*https://neathporttalbot.sharepoint.com/SitePages/DTP.aspx*).

43. We have set out the key actions, projects, and programmes to be delivered for following period, an approach which provides some flexibility around longer-term activities and has helped Digital Services staff to understand how they are contributing to the overarching corporate aims and objectives.

44. The pipeline activities are directly aligned to our strategic delivery themes, which are broken down into clear 'What, Why, and How' statements.

45. In the next section of this report, we have focused on some of the higher-value activities that have been delivered in 2023/24, arranged under their respective strategic delivery themes:

Digital By Design

46. 'We will design and develop digital services based on our residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitor needs.'

47. Highlight projects include:

    DTB-00046 - Implementation of GOV.UK Pay to replace existing online payments - Over many years councils have used a variety of commercial platforms for transaction management. All these platforms have a for profit model at their core and as such could never offer councils a real value not-for-profit proposition.

    In 2015 UK Government established "Gov.UK pay" for Central Government payment online service. This has since developed into the Gov.UK pay solution for the public sector which Digital Services has embraced.

The service is available to public sector organisations to take online card payments, with no monthly charge, no set-up fee, and no procurement process.

This Financial Year we have enabled 24 services across NPT to use the system - equating to an estimated annual saving of £12,000.

DTB-00003 - Migration and modernisation of NPT.GOV.UK to Umbraco Cloud - With a constantly changing Digital world the electronic face of the council must be continually kept relevant, accessible, and up to date. This must be achieved in the most cost-efficient manner whilst ensuring that we are clear about what is being provided to meet citizen's needs.

This year Digital Services has updated the council's website, rationalising the number of Website by 65%, removing over 50% of the previous pages by retiring redundant content. The new website structure and design has resulted in a place in the top 20 UK council website achieving an accessibility score of 99%.

DTB-00110 - Self-Service online forms Phase 1- Digital service online forms have been developed using industry best practice ensuring what is created meets NPT design standards.

This helps to increase user satisfaction by ensuring forms are easy to understand and complete.

Phase 1 has delivered 11 forms across 8 service areas which is helping to reducing the pressure of incoming calls.

48. For a full list of achievements and the associated benefits across the entire strategy please see Appendix 1 - Achievements benefit matrix 2023-24.

Using the right technology

49. 'We must ensure that the technology we use is robust, scalable, secure and efficient to meet the needs of our users.'

50. Highlight projects include:

DTB-00035 - Finance and Payroll Automation - This 2 phased project set out to automate 6 financial services processes that required intervention and inherently were prone to human error. The work was repetitive requiring considerable attention to detail.

The project concluded with all processes automated, Phase 1 returned over 1000 hrs to the service area annually, Phase 2 is targeted to return an additional 500 hours annually for the service area.

DTB-00096 - FIS Feeders (NON DTB) - As part of Digital Services ongoing promotion and support for Operational Service area process automation, our in-house development team working with Finance teams have completed a series of automations.

These automations have removed manual manipulation, checking and verification of incoming data from the process, this has subsequently saved resources time, removed human errors and significantly increased the processing speed.

This has resulted in a reduction of over 10,000 hours of effort annually, increased data integrity and ensured timely availability.

DTB-00013 - Cyber Security and Resilience Action Plan - Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Cyber Security Strategy and associated cyber security and resilience action plan has been developed to support Neath Port Talbot Council's approach to protecting its information systems, the data held within them, and the services they provided from unauthorised access, harm, or misuse.

As Secure by Design is a golden thread running through the digital strategy, from 2024/25 we will be embedding the Cyber security strategy and action plan updates into the wider DDaT strategy.

DTB-00019 - Digital Services Service Desk review and reset - including Incident, Change and Problem, along with Asset management - In Early 2024 Digital Services introduced a new modular, managed, cloud hosted Service Desk platform.

The new platform will facilitate user self-service, enhanced reporting, asset management, root cause analysis and embedded processes and procedures.

This has allowed Digital Services to deliver an enhanced, robust, streamlined service.

DTB-00020 - On Premise Data Centre Infrastructure Modernisation Programme - Following an infrastructure review which identified the ongoing running costs of the data centre as significant, a programme of work was implemented to rationalise and modernise this infrastructure.

This has allowed Digital Services to decommission some of the aging infrastructure, replaced by a more resilient, robust, secure service that facilitates delivery of the corporate decarbonisation agenda.

To date, Digital Services estimates a significant reduction in energy usage based on the original estimates provided of around £115k per annum.

51. For a full list of achievements and the associated benefits across the entire strategy please see Appendix 1 - Achievements benefit matrix 2023-24.

Data and research led decision making

52. 'We will modernise how we manage and share our data, embedding research and data analysis into our decision-making processes, while creating the right capability, infrastructure, resilience, and collaborations.'

53. Highlight projects include:

DTB-00021 - Think Family Partnership data linkage – Working with the Think Family Partnership (TFP) team in education, Digital Services have created access to multiple linked data sources across service areas.

This has resulted in a holistic view of families, more informed decision making, better service, reduced future demand and improved efficiency.

An outcome from this work has also informed a data quality improvement exercise in associated datasets.

DTB-00036 - Refresh of the Refuse & Recycling Rounds data and management process - After reviewing the data used by our refuse and recycling teams it became apparent that there were data components that were not included preventing the service from seeing the whole picture, such as missing address information, and collection day markers.

The completion of this project provided the service with a tool that allowed clear identification of location and supports key services like the Online Bin Day Finder, Missed Collections and of course helps organise council's collections.

DTB-00047 - Data maturity assessment – Digital Services commissioned an organisation-wide data maturity assessment in the summer of 2023, completed by 286 staff from 19 different

teams across all directorates, and 2 Accountable Managers group workshops.

The assessment showed Neath Port Talbot Council ranks 11th out of 24 UK local authorities and 18th out of 43 UK public sector organisations.

The Council's data maturity score was 3.3 out of 5 placing the organisation in the early Developing stage of data maturity (the fourth of the five-stage maturity journey).

The outcome from this assessment provides 3 goals and 9 recommendations for advancing the councils data maturity level, which will form part of the ongoing Data Maturity Action Plan.

54. For a full list of achievements and the associated benefits across the entire strategy please see Appendix 1 - Achievements benefit matrix 2023-24.

Our people

55. 'Our people are the most important part of this strategy. Without them we simply would not be able to deliver services to our residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitors.

56. Highlight activities include:

   Development of digital service manual, service standard and design system – developing new ways of working - Building on the Government Digital Service and Centre for Digital Public Service's Digital Service Standards, NPTC has developed its own Digital Service Manual which includes digital standards; design system; content style guide; and technology code of practice.

   There is a clear emphasis on ensuring all our services are developed by putting our people at the centre of service design,

with specific reference to making sure 'everyone' can use the services – 'Ensure we bring the most vulnerable with us, and make sure that they have the skills, secure connectivity and devices required to fully participate in digital opportunities, ensuring no one is left behind by the changes taking place.'

Digital service wellness group – The group was set up in late summer 2023 to provide advice and guidance to the Digital Services team members on improved physical health, enhance mental and emotional wellbeing, foster a healthy work environment, increase employee engagement / satisfaction, and raise awareness of services available.

To date the team have held 7 sessions with an average attendance of 20 staff offering sessions from "Walk & Talk" and "Time 2 Talk" to Stress awareness and we are what we eat.

Career Pathways aligned to DDaT profession Framework – To address an ongoing difficulty in recruiting into some key roles in the DDaT profession framework Digital Services has designed career pathways.

These pathways start the recruitment in to the role at a lower level and provide a training, education, and experience pathway to grow the in-house skills into the higher grade.

This has proven to be successful with 6 staff across the information governance, operations, and product delivery teams working through this method.

Communities of practice for service / content design across multi-agency organisations – Digital Services engages in a range of extensive local, Welsh, national, and international network of peers, mentors, industry leaders, and partners to maximise benefits of these communities.

There has been a concerted effort to ensure that the council benefits from the 5 key principles of community practice networking, learning, professional development, collaboration, and inspiration all achieved at zero or near zero cost.

The results have been successful cyber strategy and plan development, faster experience led procurement and collective process automations.

Horizon scanning across emerging technologies - Staff across Digital Services are being given time on a weekly basis to horizon scan new and emerging technologies with a view to exploring how they can be applied to the council's ways of working.

57. For a full list of achievements and the associated benefits across the entire strategy please see Appendix 1 - Achievements benefit matrix 2023-24.

Digital Services planned delivery in 2024/25

58. Given the rate of change in DDaT, the Strategy will continue to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. This will allow us to remain current and provide us with greater flexibility to adapt and update the strategy in line with the challenges and opportunities at the appropriate points.

59. Our Digital Delivery Pipeline will be continually maintained and provide visibility around the current and future prioritised projects for delivery - https://neathporttalbot.sharepoint.com/SitePages/DTP.aspx

60. Ensuring Digital Services can continue to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan, with a clear focus on the nine transformation programmes, is a key priority. We are building the necessary

capacity and skill base to support directorates in their programme delivery.

61. Current planned major activities for 2024/25 include:

Introduction of the new Digital Transformation Team (2 year with scope to extend based on outcomes)
This new team will play a pivotal role in driving business process mapping and optimisation, business transformation, and efficiency improvement initiatives across the council.

They will have expertise in analysing complex workflows, identifying business opportunities to transform by using the right technology including automation, and documenting ways of working and will be instrumental in transforming and modernising the council.

The team will go beyond the application of technology or 'quick fixes', and instead focuses on reshaping the fundamental ways of working within the organisation, streamlining, and reducing heavily administrative and paper-driven processes.

By leveraging innovative technology, design thinking, and lean principles, you will drive the transformation of the council's operations, paving the way for a more efficient, agile, and digitally enabled organisation.

This team has the potential to make significant inroads into driving transformation across services areas, which will in turn realise cashable savings.

DTB-00023 - NPT Resident Account and Self-Service online forms
A 'One Council' platform for residents, delivering a personalised multi-channel experience across our digital channels and a digital front door to the council.

DTB-00011 - Social Care Case Management Re-Platform
Go-live of the implementation of the new Social Care Case Management Platform in January 2025.

Expected benefits include:

- A single source of data.

- Standardised streamlined automated processes.

- Single person record with improved data capture.

- Self-service systems.

- Rationalised systems.

- Integrated working with collaborative tools.

DTB-00022 - Education Managed Service v4 – Migration to Hwb
Major programme of work to migrate all schools to the Hwb managed service, removing the legacy education services and providing a more resilient, scalable and supportable infrastructure.

Expected benefits include:

- Modernise the Schools end-user experience and to retire legacy infrastructure.

- Improved customer experience.

- Released capacity.

- Increased efficiency.

- Enhanced compliance.

Financial Impacts:

62. There are no financial impacts

Integrated Impact Assessment:

63. Not required

Valleys Communities Impacts:

64. Not required

Workforce Impacts:

65. None

Legal Impacts:

66. None

Risk Management Impacts:

67. Reduced risk through improved prioritisation and management of digital delivery programmes of work.

Consultation:

68. Not required

Recommendations:

69. It is recommended that Members provide continued support for the Neath Port Talbot Council DDaT Strategy.

Appendices:
Appendix 1 – Achievements benefit matrix 2023-24
Appendix 2 – Infographic summary of achievements 2023-24

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